

Cinderella and the Glass Slipper -Europe

Story #1

Once upon a time, a man had a daughter as lovely and kind as her mother. Alas, her mother died, and this man married a second wife who had two daughters exactly like their mother, too -- haughty and proud. The new bride gave her stepdaughter the meanest work and insisted that she sleep in an attic room upon a bed of straw. Her sisters never worked, and they had glorious rooms with soft, wide beds and feather pillows.

But the girl never complained about her stepmother; she did not wish to make her father sad. Instead she accepted her fate. And because she got so dirty from the ash and cinders in the fireplace, she came to be called Cinderella. One day there was an announcement in their village: The king's son was giving a ball. Everyone who was anyone was invited to attend, and Cinderella's sisters grew giddy. "How beautiful we'll be!" they crowed, whirling and swirling before their mirrors. "Make sure you iron our linens well!" the eldest, whose name was Charlotte, said to Cinderella. "And my gown shall be red velvet. Oh, how beautiful I'll be." Her younger sister smiled. "I shall wear a golden gown with diamonds." The girls' mother hired milliners and dressmakers, and Cinderella offered her sisters words of advice, for she was not only beautiful, she had a fine eye for beauty. "Cinderella," Charlotte said, taking another whirl before the mirror, admiring her elegant veil, "don't you wish you could go to the ball?" Cinderella looked at the floor. "I don't have the proper clothes," she said. Her sisters roared with laughter. "Imagine a girl of the cinders walking into the palace!" The day of the ball came, and Cinderella watched her sisters departing until they were out of sight.

Then she went to her room and burst into tears. Suddenly there was a puff of smoke and a little old lady appeared before her. "I am your fairy godmother," she said, smiling. "Why are you crying?" "I wish ..." Cinderella began, but she was weeping so hard that she could not speak. "Is it the prince's ball you wish to attend?" her fairy godmother asked. Cinderella nodded. Perhaps she was dreaming, but her fairy godmother hurried on. "Run to the garden and get a pumpkin." Cinderella did as she was asked and ran to the garden. When she returned, her fairy godmother touched the pumpkin with her wand, and poof! It became a gilded carriage. "Take me to the mouse traps," her fairy godmother said, giving Cinderella no time to ponder this extraordinary transformation. Cinderella lifted the mousetrap door, and six mice scampered out. Her fairy godmother tapped each one on the head with her wand, and they turned into six dappled horses. In another trap there was a rat, and the fairy godmother turned him into a jolly, whiskered coachman. She sent Cinderella to the garden for six lizards, and these she transformed into six fine footmen. "How do you like your equipage who shall take you to the ball?" asked her fairy godmother. "But these rags ..." Cinderella looked at her cinder-covered clothes. Her fairy godmother touched her with her wand and now she wore a silk-and-taffeta silver gown. Her shoddy shoes became glass slippers. "Take care not to stay past midnight or your coach will become a pumpkin again, your horse mice, your footmen lizards ..." "I promise!" Cinderella said as she climbed into the carriage and waved her fairy godmother goodbye. When she arrived at the ball, everyone fell silent. All eyes turned to study this vision of beauty, and the whispers began, "Who is she? Where can she be from?" The prince escorted her to the dance floor where she danced so elegantly that everyone spoke of her grace and poise. The prince could barely eat at the feast. He simply stared at this delightful young woman. Cinderella joined her sisters at their table, and even they did not recognize her. They fluttered about, honored to be noticed by the stranger. But when the clock struck a quarter 'til midnight, Cinderella hurried out of the ballroom before anyone could say a word. She got into the carriage and hurried home. Later her sisters knocked at her door. "You should have seen the stranger who came to the ball -- the most beautiful creature in the world. And she liked us!" "What was her name?" Cinderella asked. "Who knows?" Charlotte said, always irritated by details.

The next week, when the prince gave another ball, Cinderella once again attended, secretly, in her pumpkin coach. This time she was even more exquisite, and the prince could not leave her side. So dazzled and happy was Cinderella that she heard the clock only as it began to strike midnight, and she knew she must escape before the 12th chime. Once again, without a word, she hastened away. The prince called, "Wait!" but she ran too fast for him, and by the time he reached the gates, she was gone. "Where did the princess go?" the prince asked his guards. "We've seen no princess," they said, "only a girl dressed in rags running past." The prince was heartbroken, but as he walked back to the palace, he found a glass slipper lying in his path. The prince was not a fool and reckoned that the lady who owned the slipper could not live too far away. The very next day the king sent out a proclamation. "My son shall marry the girl whose foot fits the glass slipper!" When the king's servant came to Cinderella's house, her sisters struggled to stuff their feet into the slipper. Naturally they did not fit. "Let me try," Cinderella said shyly, and her sisters howled with laughter. "You?" But the gentleman servant saw this girl was a beauty, inside and out. "Everyone must try it on," he said. The slipper fit with ease, and poof! The fairy godmother appeared again and touched Cinderella with her wand, and before her astonished sisters, there stood the princess. They dropped to their knees and begged forgiveness. Ever generous and kind, Cinderella said, "I shall always love you, my sisters. I forgive you." And at the palace the prince fell to his knees and asked her to marry him. The next day they were wed, and Cinderella gave her sisters a home in the palace where everyone lived happily ever after.